DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 070 CE 060 887

AUTHOR Cuellar, Sylvia
TITLE Literacy Initiatives of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service.
INSTITUTION Texas A and M Univ., College Station. Texas Agricultural Extension Service.
PUB DATE 16 Oct 91
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (Montreal, Quebec, October 16, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

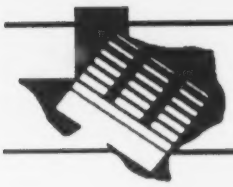
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; *Agency Cooperation; Coordination; Extension Agents; *Extension Education; Illiteracy; Leadership Training; *Literacy Education; Material Development; Program Development; *Rural Extension; State Programs; *Statewide Planning
IDENTIFIERS *Texas

ABSTRACT

The Texas Agricultural Extension Service (TAEX) Literacy Initiative has three major components: literacy awareness, cooperation and coordination with other state agencies and organizations, and programmatic responses. During 1991, the TAEX Literacy Initiative addressed the literacy awareness component through these activities: writing a research review on the dimensions of literacy, forming an Extension Ad Hoc Task Force on Literacy at the state level to develop and direct county-level education programs, and developing a literacy program guide. Cooperation and coordination strategies and accomplishments include the following: state Extension faculty in home economics are working with the Texas Extension Homemakers Association in their state efforts to address illiteracy at the county level; an Extension Associate for Literacy is working with the Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning at Texas A&M University in dissemination of literacy information; and the Ad Hoc Task Force on Literacy has worked cooperatively with a number of agencies and organizations. Three programmatic responses were undertaken: a project to review TAEX publications to assess readability levels, an "Unwriting Workshop," and development of leader training packets and home economics low-literacy materials. County efforts by TAEX faculty in literacy education include formation of various community groups and committees to address the problem, development of low-literacy materials, and presentation of courses and seminars. (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED344070



Texas Agricultural Extension Service

Literacy Initiatives of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S Cuellar

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented by
Sylvia Cuéllar

at the
40th Annual Adult Education Conference
Montréal, Québec

Wednesday, October 16, 1991

CE060887

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Literacy Initiatives of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service - 1991

Situation

Texas is faced with alarming statistics related to the literacy of its citizens: 18% of adults have not completed the 8th grade, 36% of adults have not completed high school, 63% of AFDC payments are made to individuals who have not completed high school, and 85% of the inmates in Texas prisons have not completed high school. It is estimated that one in three adults cannot read, write or perform basic math skills well enough to be productive on the job. The increase of immigrants and minority populations (Asians, Hispanics, Afro-Americans) in our state compounds the literacy problem. A wide variety of agencies and organizations provide adult literacy services in Texas. However, in a survey conducted by the Texas Department of Commerce, no programs were reported in 76 (66%) of the 116 counties with populations less than 9,999, and 21 (39%) of the 54 counties with populations between 10,000 and 19,999. It is estimated that 75% to 80% of those citizens in need of literacy education are not being reached. (source: Texas Literacy Council Resource Guide, 1990)

Literacy is not only the ability to read and write but the possession of basic skills to function as a productive member of society. These fundamental skills are necessary to participate in the economic, political, social and cultural life of the community. Clearly, illiteracy creates barriers to participation. Literacy education for adults, families and at the workplace, help break down the barriers that prevent many Texans from fully participating and taking advantage of the opportunities open to them.

The TAEX Literacy Initiative, as outlined in the "Statewide Initiatives of the 1991-94 Long Range Extension Program, White Papers," has three major components. These are literacy awareness, cooperation and coordination with other state agencies and organizations, and programmatic responses. The following update outlines strategies and accomplishments in the effort to address these three components.

Literacy Awareness

A research brief entitled "Dimensions of Illiteracy: A Texas Dilemma" was written and distributed to county Extension agents. This research review provides each county an overview of the problems that face Texas, ranked 47th among the states in literacy.

A white paper was written and distributed to all Extension faculty outlining TAEX efforts to coordinate, collaborate and disseminate literacy information.

Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, handicap, or national origin.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, and County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating.

An Extension Ad Hoc Task Force on Literacy was formed at the state level to help developand direct literacy education programs at he county level. Task Force was made up of Extension faculty from across disciplines and administrative levels. Task Force also included representatives from Prairie View A&M 1980 Extension Program and the Texas Extension Homemakers Association. The Task Force was dissolved in November upon completion of its task.

A literacy program guide was developed and distributed to all Extension faculty providing a resource for program development at the county level.

Two fact sheets were drafted outlining the parameters of Family Literacy and Youth and Literacy initiatives.

Cooperation and Coordination

State Extension faculty in home economics are working with the Texas Extension Homemakers Association (TEHA) in their State efforts to address illiteracy at the county level.

Family Life Specialist (D. Welch), and Extension Associate for Literacy (S. Cuéllar) serve as advisors of the TEHA Family Life and Resources Committee. This committee planned a workshop for their members on literacy at their state conference held in September. Focus of the workshop "Literacy: It's Everybody's Business." The October-December issue of their state newsletter, The Messenger, contained four articles addressing literacy. Members are encouraged to contribute their time and efforts to address the illiteracy problem in our state. A resolution was passed committing the organization to help eradicate the illiteracy problem in the state.

Extension Associate for Literacy (S. Cuellar) and chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Literacy (P. Owens) addressed 2 TEHA district meetings on the literacy problems in Texas including the efforts TAEX has undertaken. Approximately 600 TEHA members attended these two meetings.

Extension Associate for Literacy (S. Cuellar) works closely with the Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning at Texas A&M University (TAMU) in dissemination of literacy information, and providing updates and information of concern to Extension Agents at the county level.

Ad Hoc Task Force on Literacy has worked cooperatively with the following agencies and organizations:

-Bryan Independent School District
-College Station Independent School District
-Literacy Volunteers of America
-National Center for Family Literacy
-Private Industry Council (PIC)
-Regional Education Service Centers (ESC)
-Child Care Clearinghouse
-Houston I.S.D.
-local literacy councils
-Prairie View A&M University
-READ Commission of Houston
-Texas A&I University

-Texas A&M College of Education
-Texas Agricultural Extension Service
-Texas State Library
-Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning (TCALL)
-TX Adult Literacy Laubach
-Texas Education Agency (TEA)
-Texas Literacy Council (TLC)

Associate Professor and Literacy Initiative Team Leader (P. Owens) is working cooperatively with Texas A&I University to help plan and conduct a South Texas Literacy Conference targeted to serve providers of literacy education. "Family Literacy Conference--A Community Effort" is scheduled at Texas A&I University in cooperation with TAEX, Child Care Clearinghouse, Central Stream Migrant Education Program, Texas A&I University departments of Bilingual Education, Home Economics and Center for Continuing Education. Focus of the conference is addressing family literacy problems through networking, programs and projects, and research. The conference will be held February 28-29, 1992.

Programmatic Responses

A project to review TAEX publications across program areas to assess their readability levels was undertaken. Results indicate that existing publications are at readability grade levels between 5-19. Recommendations for editing the publications to an appropriate level between grades 5-8 for low-literacy audiences were made. Seventy-six publications have been reviewed.

"Unwriting Workshop" - A workshop was been presented, utilizing video and worksheet format, teaching Extension faculty how to "unwrite" and reword information for low-literacy audiences. The following groups have participated in the workshop: Home Economics faculty, 1890 Extension Communications faculty and the TAEX Ad Hoc Task Force on Literacy.

Two leader training packets have been written targeted to Extension Homemaker Clubs. These packets approach literacy education at two levels. One packet entitled "Illiteracy In Texas: The Hard Facts" provides an awareness of the literacy problem in Texas. The second packet entitled "The Who, What, When, Where and How of a Community Literacy Effort" provides guidelines for forming community task forces or coalitions to address literacy.

4-H Reading Fest project for the 4-H Ambassadors program has been developed to support their efforts in community service. The Reading Fest is targeted to low-literacy elementary age children to encourage and promote the fun of reading.

Home economics low-literacy materials were developed:

-Project Home Safe publications for parents have been rewritten at a 5th-6th grade reading level. They have also been translated into Spanish for non-English speaking parents.

-Child Safety Seat materials have been rewritten and flyers/bulletins redesigned to reach

low-literacy parents with small children, to encourage use of child safety seat in automobiles.

Town and Country Church Conference - Peggy Owens, Associate Professor and Literacy Initiative Team Leader, and Sylvia Cuéllar, Extension Associate - Literacy Education, presented a session on "Illiteracy in Texas--A Community Response." Materials were utilized from Literacy Laubach International addressing the role of the church in literacy education.

Agent materials were developed to help counties organize a local literacy program. "Building a Literacy Coalition" and "Literacy Programs: Guidelines for Utilizing Volunteers" provide support for local literacy task forces in identifying goals, targeting audiences, and outlining strategies for establishing a literacy program.

TAEX County Efforts in Literacy Education

Here are some examples of what is currently being done in Texas by Extension faculty in the area of literacy:

Sylvia Cuéllar, Extension Associate - Literacy, began working in the new position in January, 1991. She has assessed Extension materials for their readability level and has found them to be in the 5th-19th grade reading level. She assisted Extension Homemaker clubs, who have selected literacy as their focus for 1991, and is also working with 4-H specialists to incorporate literacy activities into their programs. Sylvia has written numerous news articles and fact sheets to bring about literacy awareness to Extension personnel. She is an active board member of the Literacy Volunteers of America - Brazos Valley and has completed their tutor training program. Sylvia and Peggy Owens are working with the College Station I.S.D. Head Start director to establish a family literacy program.

Loretta Osburn, CEA for Brooks County, has worked with her literacy task force to form the Heart's Delight Literacy Council. Finding that 56% of the county adult population has less than an 11th grade education, the task force visited different literacy programs, invited speakers to address the issue, and found trainers who would instruct volunteer tutors. The Extension Homemakers covered the cost of the trainers, and in September, 1990, twenty people were trained. Edward Shell Memorial Library received money to purchase Laubach materials. Flyers and letters were distributed announcing the program and asking community organizations to sponsor the workbooks. The program currently has 10 students enrolled plus more on the waiting list.

Connie Sheppard, CEA for Gonzalez County, began the process of forming a county-wide coalition to develop a family literacy program. She and representatives of the Gonzalez ISD attended a two-week training session at the National Center for Family Literacy in Kentucky and applied for a federal Even Start grant to establish a family literacy program.

Joyce Carlen, CEA for Harris County, has established a literacy steering committee consisting of private literacy groups, colleges, libraries, and volunteers. In August, 1990, a

literacy workshop was held to train volunteers, among which were 4-H Ambassadors and advisors. She would like to see Extension materials adjusted for low-literacy readers and distributed to literacy programs to be used as reading material.

Dena Wise, CEA for Hardin County, has been involved with literacy efforts for five years. She also has received the National Center for Family Literacy training, and also applied for an Even Start grant to establish a family literacy program.

Judy Beavers, CEA for Mills County, rallied community support for a local literacy program by speaking to members of the Lions Club. A local computer expert designed a special English as a Second Language computer program to be used in the program. Local businesses and agencies contributed materials, expertise, and support. The 4-H youth served as baby sitters for the project. For the second series, a Spanish as a Second Language program was incorporated. Seventeen Hispanics and six Anglos participated in classes. Skills in reading and conversation in English and Spanish were improved. Participants reported that their self esteem and confidence were increased by the new language and computer skills attained.

Sandra Kunkel, CEA for Karnes County, organized a literacy council funded by the Texas Education Agency. The coalition includes libraries, churches, schools, JTPA, and adult probation offices. The volunteer coordinator of the program operates from her home, and tutoring takes place in the libraries. Twenty learners have gone through the program since September of 1990.

Cheryl Brewer, CEA for Van Zandt County, has presented awareness programming in literacy. She is in the process of forming a literacy coalition in her county. She is working with the University of Texas at Tyler in planning and organizing the coalition and tutor program. Cheryl has two volunteers ready to tutor when the program is organized. She has completed the LVA tutor training in order to be better prepared for working in the adult literacy area.

Sandy Dennis, CEA for Polk County, is organizing a literacy task force. One of her Family Community Leader participants presented a session on being a literacy tutor at the Texas Extension Homemakers Association state conference. As a result of the workshop presentation, 18 persons requested more information on literacy tutoring. Sandy has identified literacy as her IMPAC area for the next three years.

Kathy Smith, CEA for Burleson County, is planning a literacy awareness campaign in her county. She is planning public programs, new articles and other media efforts to promote interest in the illiteracy problem in her county.

Joan Gillespie, CEA for Webb County, is working on a "Household Water Quality in South Texas Colonias" project which includes collecting samples from water stored in colonia homes, testing the water for contaminants, and developing an educational campaign to include electronic media and on-site information about safe and unsafe water storage practices. Information will meet the needs of an audience with diverse literacy levels and language preference.

Edwin Bright, CEA for Dallas County, met with Mr. Frank Cortez, president of the Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, to discuss the low participation rate of Hispanic youth in 4-H programs. Mr. Cortez was given training in five short-term 4-H projects. He is now seeking adult leadership to begin work in 1992. The main purpose will be to expand youth involvement in 4-H activities to improve literacy and prevent gangs.

Joan Gillespie, CEA for Webb County, developed a series of low-literacy parenting letters to include child development, communication, self-esteem, and guidance. The letter series was developed with teen parents in mind. Color, appropriate graphics and limited reading level were considerations. The letter series is culturally relevant for Hispanic teens. This letter series is a way of reaching a non-traditional (Hispanic teen parents) audience.

Cheryl Schneider, CEA for Wilson County, together with the home economics committee, and the English as a Second Language (ESL) director and teacher felt that nutrition and literacy education would help Hispanic residents understanding good nutrition and diabetes. The county agent, dietician, and 4-H nutrition project members taught ESL students basic nutrition and guidelines to health and diabetes. By the third lesson of the series, students had changed their eating habits with new foods.

Naomi Williams Hunt, CEA for Howard County, was asked by county commissioners to teach indigent health clients how to manage diabetes. A twice monthly workshop was taught in English and Spanish using multiple methods and hands-on activities due to literacy limits. In 1990 a 6-week short course was conducted for non-indigent diabetics, and in 1991 a support group was formed. Two sessions were held and lessons were presented in English and sign language for the deaf. Improvements were found in practices, knowledge, skills, and attitudes of participants.

Sherry Jeanes, CEA for San Augustine County, in cooperation with San Augustine High School administrators and teachers, planned a four-part personal responsibility seminar to reach youth-at-risk and teenage parents. Statistics indicate 25% of the county's births are to girls ages 15-19. School officials reported that this compounds the problems of illiteracy, school drop-outs, and poverty. Two sessions of the seminar were conducted with 20 youths attending each. Participants developed skills in responsibility, decision making, goal setting, and teenage parenting.

Linda B. Sullivan, CEA for Kenedy/Kleberg Counties, noted that underachievers in elementary school often do not receive adequate help and encouragement from parents. This may be due to illiteracy, low income, lack of time or knowledge of general parenting. Linda taught life skills and nutrition on a monthly basis to 26 parents. The lessons helped improve parental skills and knowledge, and encouraged parents to adopt new parental practices.

Clara Maynard, CEA for Bastrop County, served as chair of Save Tomorrow Community Task Force to address the areas of substance abuse, school dropout, teen pregnancy, juvenile crime, and illiteracy. As a result of task force efforts, better communication between school officials and students have been established. Community programs on gangs, cults, drugs, and alcohol have been planned.

Rebecca Dimak, CEA for Brazos County and Richard John, CEA for Colorado County are currently enrolled in a Family Literacy course for graduate students at Texas A&M University.

Literacy Program Update 1991, written by S. Cuéllar and P. Owens, has been submitted and accepted by ERIC, and should be available by the summer of 1992. This 244 page document contains copies of the actual documents used in program development, agent and staff training, Extension activities for clientele, organization and program support, coordination and cooperation, and professionalization.